

Revision Topic - Access and Recreation

Need for Change

Access to NFS lands is one of the most controversial topics, both internally and externally, in forest management today. Because of the level of this controversy, it is appropriate to address Access and Travel Management as part of Forest Plan Revision. Public dissatisfaction with current direction and policies is apparent in both the media coverage that is devoted to it, and in the public meetings that are held on a regular basis across both forests. This dissatisfaction is evident on both sides of the controversy. That is, there are some groups that advocate that access to NFS lands is much too limited, both in where people can go and how they get there, and there are groups that advocate that there are not enough restrictions on where people can go and how they get there.

The 1987 Forest Plans do not provide adequate direction to address the changes in recreation demands and technology and shifts in management practices that have occurred over the last fifteen years. Forest Plan Revision provides the opportunity to address these changes. Some of the changes that have occurred are as follows:

- Increased user demand over the last fifteen years. Since the 1987 Forest Plans were developed, motorized and non-motorized modes of travel have increased and diversified. In the case of the IPNFs, communities like Spokane, Coeur d'Alene and Sandpoint have experienced significant population growth. For the KNF, areas like the Flathead Valley and Missoula areas have grown. This growth in population has resulted in an increase in the numbers and types of users of NFS lands. Roads that were originally constructed and used for timber harvest are now predominantly used for recreation purposes, and resource protection and restoration.
- Technological advancements in recreational equipment has resulted in forest users accessing areas that were not accessible fifteen years ago and pursuing recreational activities in ways that were not possible historically. Motorized vehicles, such as snowmobiles and ATVs, can access areas much further into the forest than they could historically.
- Changes in logging system technology and feasibility have advanced and the need for high-density road systems is no longer a critical factor for harvest activities. Changes in financial resources have limited our ability to adequately maintain the existing road systems on the two forests. The National Fire Plan (NFP) and a shift in fire management have changed how access is considered. Weed control and eradication has emerged in the last decade as a prominent factor to consider in terms of access on NFS lands.
- One of the more controversial changes has been the miles of roads that have been put into restricted status. In order to meet wildlife habitat needs, NFS roads have been put into restricted status at a faster rate and over a shorter period of time, than was estimated in the 1987 Forest Plans.
- The need for watershed restoration work and the means to meet those needs was not addressed in the 1987 Forest Plans. This has led to the method of re-contouring roads as a means of decommissioning.
- In January of 2001, a new Forest Roads Rule and Policy was issued which revised regulations concerning the management, use, and maintenance of the National Forest Transportation System. Forest Plan Revision provides the opportunity to incorporate this direction into the Forest Plans (USDA 2001b).

Based on these changed conditions there is a need to better integrate social needs and resource management directions with access management.

Laws and Regulations

The Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act (MUSYA) of 1960 provides the direction to NFS lands to provide access and recreation opportunities. The Act states, “The policy of Congress is that national forests are established and administered for outdoor recreation...”

The Wilderness Act of 1964 was passed to establish wilderness lands for the “... use and enjoyment of the American people...”

The National Forest Roads and Trails Act of 1964 declared that an adequate system of roads and trails be constructed and maintained to meet the increasing demand for recreation and other uses.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 establishes three classes of river systems: wild, scenic, and recreation. The purpose of the act was to protect the river “... for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.”

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 declares that “...the public lands be managed in a manner that...will provide for outdoor recreation and human occupancy and use.”

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976 sets forth the requirements for Land and Resource Management Plans for the NFS. The 1982 regulations associated with NFMA (36 CFR 219.21) require the following related to recreation resource planning:

To the degree consistent with needs and demands for all major resources, a broad spectrum of forest and rangeland related outdoor recreation opportunities shall be provided for in each alternative. Planning activities to achieve this shall be in accordance with national and regional direction and procedural requirements of paragraphs (a) through (g) in CFR 219.21.

Executive Order 11644 (and as amended by E.O. 11989 of 1977) (Use of Off-road Vehicles on the Public Lands) of 1972 establishes policy and procedure “...that will ensure that the use of off-road vehicles on public lands will be controlled and directed so as to protect the resources of those lands, to promote the safety of all users of those lands, and to minimize conflicts among the various uses of those lands.”

Forest Service Strategic Plan

The USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan (Revision 2000) provides guidance for future agency actions. Goal 2 and Goal 4 in the Strategic Plan relate to access and recreation issues.

Goal 2 “Multiple Benefits to People” states: Provide a variety of uses, values, products and services for present and future generations by managing within the capability of sustainable ecosystems.”

Objective 2.a states: “Improve the capability of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to provide diverse, high quality outdoor recreation opportunities. The measure of this objective is the trend in user satisfaction by use and geographic region.”

Objective 2.b states: “Improve the capability of wilderness and protected areas to sustain a desired range of benefits and values. The measure of this objective is the trend in user satisfaction by use and geographic region.”

Goal 4 “Effective Public Service” states: Ensure the acquisition and use of an appropriate corporate infrastructure to enable the efficient delivery of a variety of uses.”

Objective 4.b states: “Improve the safety and economy of USDA Forest Service roads, trails, facilities, and operations and provide greater security for the public and employees. The measure of this objective is the trend in infrastructure, services, and operations meeting public service safety standards.”

Objective 4.f. states: “Provide appropriate access to NFS lands and ensure nondiscrimination in the delivery of all USDA Forest Service programs. The measure of this objective is the trend in public and administrative access to NFS lands and USDA programs.”

The Forest Plans and Monitoring and Evaluation

IPNFs Forest Plan

The IPNFs 2001 Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Report has the following information related to access and recreation:

- Forest Plan Monitoring: Other Topics of Interest – Ecosystem Restoration (USDA 2002c, p. 56)
“There were 136.2 miles of road obliterated in FY 2001 as part of ecosystem restoration work, using a variety of funds. There were 1,210.7 miles of road obliteration on the IPNFs from FY 1991-2001. System roads are generally the ones that are inventoried, maintained and managed by the forest. The other roads are not.”

The IPNF’s monitoring report contained limited information relative to recreation use and user conflicts. Monitoring item D-1 examined and tracked the potential impacts related to Off-highway vehicles. The manner in which this monitoring item was established makes it very difficult to determine whether or not impacts are occurring as a result of off-highway vehicle use. Establishing new monitoring items that more definitively track the impacts associated with off-highway vehicle use is something the new plan will need to address.
- Forest Plan Monitoring Item B-5: Road Construction (USDA 1998b, p. 14)
“The Forest Plan projected that 176 miles of new roads would be constructed each year and 97 miles would be reconstructed. ...the projected amount of annual new road construction (176 miles) was much greater than the amount that actually occurred for every year from 1988-1998. For road reconstruction the amount projected (97 miles) was exceeded for 8 of the 11 years. Road reconstruction generally occurs on older roads and is necessary to bring them up to standards so they are drivable.”

KNF Forest Plan

The following information related to access and recreation was provided in the KNF 2000 M&E and 1997 M&E reports (USDA 2001d, USDA 1998a):

- Emerging Issue: Monitoring Item H-2 (USDA 2001d, p. 53) – Roads and Associated Access Issues:

Road Maintenance: The inability to maintain existing roads to an acceptable standard continues to be a major concern both internally and with the public. There is a conflicting need to improve watershed conditions with the need to maintain public access.

Road Closures: In general, road closures have become part of the public’s concern over federal versus local control.

Access: Public comments include concerns about access to the forest for a variety of reasons, including snowmobile or OHV use in designated and recommended Wilderness Areas. There is a conflicting need to provide backcountry winter access with the need to maintain habitat security for lynx and other species. The Forest Plan allows snowmobiling in the Ten Lakes Wilderness Study Area (WSA), however, opponents interpret it as authorization at the level of use at the time the Forest Plan was approved. Since 1987, use in the Ten Lakes WSA has increased significantly including non-typical use by llama and mountain bikers. There is also a conflicting need to provide access to private lands (ANILCA) with a need to maintain habitat security, especially for grizzly bear.”

- Forest Plan Budget: Monitoring Item H-4 (USDA 2001d, p. 59)

“Recreation: (total of developed and dispersed use, in recreation visitor days) – Compared to the 1987 Forest Plan, recreation budgets are lower and outputs are higher. Continuing difficulty in obtaining full funding on a national basis affects this program area. However, outputs are steadily increasing as more people volunteer and challenge grants help reduce this gap between planned and realized funding. The quality of the recreation experience could diminish if the current cooperation diminishes and the budget gap continues. The low reliability and accuracy of the dispersed recreation use data (for example, using traffic counts to calculate driving for pleasure and viewing values) may also be a contributing factor to the large overrun of outputs.”

- Emerging Issues: Monitoring Item H-2 (USDA 1998a, p. 99)

“Balancing Road Closures to Meet Forest Plan Standards While Providing Access to the National Forests for the Public: Recent planning efforts indicate that the Forest Plan open road density standard of .75 miles per square mile in Management Area (MA) 12 cannot be achieved in some areas without closing all the roads including main collector roads and loop roads, which have been traditionally used for decades. Projects which cannot meet the standard are either being winter logged, deferred, or a Forest Plan amendment (generally programmatic, meaning it is in effect for the life of the Forest Plan) is being proposed. In addition, some projects cannot be implemented without opening a closed road. When the road is opened, the open road density standards are not met. In these cases, the projects are modified, dropped, or project-specific amendment (which is only for that project) is proposed. Response to road closures has included an increasing number of signs and gates being vandalized or removed.”

- Road Access Management Monitoring: Item L-1 (USDA 1998a, p. 106):

“Background: Prior to the 1987 Forest Plan, about 27% of the inventoried NFS roads were in restricted status either yearlong or seasonally (Forest Plan FEIS, USDA 1987b, p. IV-51). The Forest Plan projected that in order to provide the issue resolution desired, about 57% of the roads would eventually need some form of restriction. This would be about double the amount of road restrictions in the 1987 Forest Plan. The assumption was that the number of new roads needed to harvest timber would increase significantly, and that they would all be restricted after the timber sales were completed -- the net result being a lot more road restriction but about the same level of original access for the public. The need for additional road restrictions was to protect dispersed recreation values, provide for wildlife security in big game winter and summer range, reduce road maintenance costs, and provide for grizzly bear recovery. Because of the significant increase in the amount of road restrictions needed (from 27% to 57%), it was assumed that it would take about 10 years to accomplish, about an 11% increase each year to reach the planned level.

Evaluation: By 1997, enough roads had been restricted to meet the goal of having closures on approximately 57% of the KNF's roads. Table 1-25 shows the progression of closures through time. The closed roads have been both yearlong and seasonal closures. Although the percentage of road closures has been achieved as expected, the total amount of road access is less than expected. This is because road construction has been less than anticipated due to reductions in the timber sale program (see Monitoring Item E-1 for details). The road closures have been placed not only on new logging roads, but also on older roads, which were not anticipated for a significant level of closures in the Forest Plan. The reasons for closures include wildlife habitat security, to save maintenance costs, to decrease erosion, and improve hydrological conditions. Access has been identified as an emerging issue (Monitoring Item H-2). Response to closures on existing roads includes an increasing number of signs and gates being vandalized or removed.”

Table 1-25: Forest Roads Access Restrictions

FY	Total Miles of Road	Total Miles of Restricted Access	% of Total Roads Restricted	Total Miles of Unrestricted Access	Difference in Miles of Unrestricted Access from FY 87
87	6,200	1,669	27%	4,530	0
88	6,972	3,195	45%	3,777	(753)
89	7,112	3,260	45%	3,852	(678)
90	7,052	3,041	43%	4,011	(519)
91	7,131	3,734	52%	3,399	(1,131)
92	7,149	3,784	53%	3,365	(1,165)
93	7,377	3,990	54%	3,387	(1,143)
94	7,350	4,062	55%	3,280	(1,242)
97	7,460	4,275	57%	3,185	(1,345)

Forest system roads only, that are restricted to motor vehicles both yearlong and seasonally.

Source: 1997 KNF Monitoring and Evaluation Report

Planning Questions for Access and Recreation

Planning questions have been developed to provide context to the access and recreation revision topic. These questions are followed by a description of the historic and current condition and form the baseline to compare the effects of the alternatives. Additional analysis will be completed for the DEIS to more fully address these questions. This information will provide the decision maker with the knowledge necessary to understand the issue and make a decision.

Planning Question - What are the types, quantities, and distribution of access that historically and currently exist and what are the trends?
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Type: What is on the KIPZ to use and how can it be used? Presently there are three major types of concern: roads, trails, and general forest areas (i.e. any area off of a road or trail). Relative to how they can be used, the topic revolves around whether motorized or non-motorized modes of travel are permitted or restricted.

Quantity: How much of it is available to use? In relation to roads, trails, and general forest areas, whether a certain type of use is permitted or restricted and whether restrictions are yearlong or seasonal.

Distribution: Where on the forest is access available?

Historic Condition of Access

In the early 19th century, Euro-American fur traders entered the Northwest via trails and river routes established by Native Americans. Modern railroads and highways follow many of the same routes. Traffic along these routes increased with use by missionaries, exploration and survey teams, miners, settlers, and other travelers. Railroads were built late in the 19th century and enabled mining and logging ventures to develop, providing opportunities for permanent settlement. The need and demand to improve and expand the existing trails to allow passage of wagons continued as people continued to migrate to the Northwest.

The settlement of the lower elevations and river valleys continued in the 20th century and the logging and mining industries expanded. The first influence of road building due to the logging industry was from horse drawn sleigh trails and temporary railroads. Horse drawn skid trails and sleigh trails were developed to transport logs to the rivers. Some of these trails evolved into roads.

The temporary railroads were located and built to acceptable railroad grades. The rails were removed after logging was completed in an area and some of the excavated grades were later utilized as roads.

By 1925, most of the highways and some of the county roads had been established. The transportation system consisted of these public roads and a network of private roads. Some private roads provided access to homesteads and homes. Other private roads were developed for logging on private or lumber company lands. Some homesteaders sold their land to lumber companies who, in turn, would harvest timber, then trade or transfer the land to the Forest Service. Many of the original logging roads developed during this early part of the century still remain on the landscape. During this time the Forest Service was developing an extensive trail system to access and manage National Forest lands. Many of these trail locations would evolve into roads.

The Roosevelt New Deal Policy and the establishment of the Civilian Conservation Corps supported the road construction activities of the 1930's. Many of the fire lookouts and roads to the lookouts were built during this time.

Wood demand during World War II contributed to the increase of logging activity and road building in the Northwest. Timber harvest and road construction continued to increase after the war to meet the home construction demands of a growing United States population. Road building started in earnest in the 1950's and continued through the 1980's. The majority of roads that now comprise the transportation system on the national forests were built or reconstructed during this time. Many miles of roads were built as cost-share roads with corporate landowners between 1960-1980.

Road building for timber harvest continued through the rest of the century, though at a much slower rate than before. Changes in logging methods, a moratorium directive on road building in roadless areas, land exchanges, and appropriations, have influenced how roads are managed and maintained in the last decade. Private road construction to access residential land has increased in the last 15 years and has resulted in an increase in requests for easements and right-of-ways across NFS lands.

Current Condition of Access

The first two columns in Summary of Roads Table 1-26 show how many miles of road were inventoried on the KNF and IPNFs in 1987 and what is currently in the inventories. This Table shows a 22% increase on the IPNFs and a 26% on KNF. It should be noted that this increase did not result entirely from new road construction. Over the last few years, a more thorough and accurate accounting of previously un-inventoried roads contributed to the current total miles. Columns 3 and 4 show the miles of road that are open yearlong on each forest. The last two columns display the miles of road on each forest that are currently seasonally restricted or restricted yearlong.

The IPNFs currently have approximately 69% of its roads in yearlong or seasonally restricted status. This is nine percent higher than the 50% to 60% as projected in the 1987 Forest Plan (USDA 1987c, p. II-23).

The KNF currently has approximately 63% of its the roads in yearlong or seasonally restricted status. This is six percent higher than the 57% projected in the 1987 Forest Plan (USDA 1987a, p. II-10).

Table 1-26: Summary of Roads by Travel Management Status

	Existing National Forest System Roads Under FS Jurisdiction (mi.)		Roads Open Yearlong (mi.)		Roads Seasonally Restricted (mi.)	Roads Restricted Yearlong (mi.)
	1987	Current	1987	Current	Current	Current
Idaho Panhandle	9,500	11,621	*	3,527	1,036	6,979
				29%	95%	60%
Kootenai	6,300	7,954	4,530	2,934	765	4,217
				37%	10%	53%

Source: USFS Infra database * = Information not available

Note: Approx 79 miles of road on the IPNFs have unassigned Travel Management Status

Approx. 38 miles of road on the KNF have unassigned Travel Management Status

The Summary of Trails Table 1-27 shows how many miles of trail were inventoried in 1987. Please note that the increase in total miles of trails on both the KNF and IPNFs from 1987 to today can be attributed to previously unmaintained and abandoned trails being put back into use, converting other constructed features to function as trails (roads, railroads, etc.) and some limited new construction to tie existing trails to new trailhead locations. The IPNFs shows an increase of 38% in miles of trail (restricted and not restricted to motorized use combined) from 1987. Of the current total of 2,728 miles of designated trails, 1,553 (57%) are available for motorized use.

The KNF shows an increase of 22% in miles of trail (restricted and not restricted to motorized use combined) from 1987. Of the current total of 1,587 miles of designated trails, 585 miles (37%) are available for motorized use.

There are some trails on both forests that, even though they do not have legal restrictions on motorized use, preclude motorized use due to the physical characteristics of the trail (too steep, too many physical barriers, etc).

The current trend for existing NFS roads and trails is to progress towards smaller systems that can be maintained within financial limitations and with acceptable environmental effects. Efforts to restore watershed conditions by reducing road caused impacts to water quality are being given high priority and decommissioning of roads is one method being used to achieve this goal. Wildlife habitat needs are being addressed with the implementation of restrictions on NFs roads.

Table 1-27: Summary of Trails

	Trails (mi.)	Trails Where Motorized Use is Restricted (mi.)		Trails Where Motorized Use is Not Restricted (mi.)		Designated Skiing Trails (mi.)	Roads Restricted Yearlong (mi.)
	1987 ¹	1987	Current	1987	Current	Current ³	Current ³
Idaho Panhandle	9,500	*	1,175 ²	*	1,553 ²	73	1,244
Kootenai	6,300	*	1,002 ⁴	*	585 ²	109	166

Source: ¹ KNF and IPNFs 1987 Forest Plans, ² Meaningful Measures data, ³ R1 2001-2002 Summaries for Snowmobile and Ski Touring Trails, ⁴ Current 36 CFR 261.50 (a) (b) * = Information not available

Access Decisions

The site specific types, quantities, and distribution of access on the KNF and IPNFs is determined at the District level and depicted on maps and associated legal orders. It includes many facets, including mode of transportation, restrictions, signing, visitor information, monitoring, and enforcement. All users of the national forests, be they the general public, private land owners, corporate entities, or the agency itself, are impacted when decisions are made by the Districts regarding access.

The IPNFs 1987 Forest Plan gives direction for the development of District Road Management Plans, which would be used to establish policy for each individual road on the District. Currently, the South Zone and Central Zone of the IPNFs have 2002 Travel Maps and the North Zone has their latest scheduled for release in February of 2003.

The KNF 1987 Forest Plan gives no direction for Travel Planning other than, “The Forest Travel Planning process will be used to review, evaluate, and implement the goals and standards of the Management Areas, with regard to roads, trails, and motorized-vehicle use.” Nowhere in the KNF Forest Plan is the Forest Travel Planning process described.

However, the Districts on the KNF have been doing Travel Planning in conjunction with project planning and following the Northern Region Guide for Access and Travel Management. The results of the decisions made through project planning are displayed on the individual Road Access Maps that are prepared by each district on a yearly basis.

Financial Considerations

One aspect of the amount of access that can reasonably be provided is the fiscal reality of being able to maintain the existing NFS Roads and Trails to appropriate standards. How to pay for these maintenance needs has been a topic of debate. At the core of this debate is the fundamental question of how much funding is needed and how much funding is available to meet those maintenance needs.

Different roads require different amounts of maintenance. Needs are determined based on the maintenance level that roads are assigned. Five different levels of maintenance are assigned to NFS roads:

Maintenance Level 1 – Basic custodial care - Assigned to intermittent service roads during time they are closed to vehicular traffic.

Maintenance Level 2 – High clearance vehicles - Assigned to roads operated for use by high clearance vehicles.

Maintenance Level 3 – Suitable for passenger cars - Assigned to roads operated and maintained for travel by a prudent driver in a standard passenger car.

Maintenance Level 4 – Moderate degree of user comfort - Assigned to roads that provide a moderate degree of user comfort at moderate travel speeds.

Maintenance Level 5 – High degree of user comfort - Assigned to roads that provide a high degree of user comfort and convenience. (FSH 7709.58)

Over the years, as more roads were constructed on the national forests, there was a relative increase in the miles of roads that needed to be maintained and an increase in costs to construct and maintain them.

When timber harvest operations were peaking in the 1980’s and early 1990’s, a substantial amount of road maintenance was accomplished with the timber sale contracts. As timber harvest has declined, so has the amount of road maintenance accomplished through those contracts. As a result more and more road maintenance needs, both annual and deferred, are dependent on appropriated dollars.

Deferred maintenance is maintenance that was not performed when it should have been or when it was scheduled and which, therefore, was put off or delayed for a future period. When allowed to accumulate

without limits or consideration of useful life, deferred maintenance leads to deterioration of performance, increased costs to repair, and decrease in asset value.

The amount of funding available through this appropriation process has not kept pace with the needs. This means that our annual and deferred maintenance work is not getting done and we are losing our capital investments in our roads systems. As deferred maintenance remains undone, it will cost more in the future to bring roads up to standards. As annual maintenance remains undone, there is a greater risk of increased costs in the future and for unacceptable resource impacts to occur.

In the last five years, an intensive field inventory of deferred and annual maintenance needs has been conducted and an estimate of costs to bring all of our roads up to their assigned maintenance levels has been completed. Table 1-28 displays the mileage of roads in the five different Objective Maintenance Levels and the estimated annual and deferred maintenance costs.

- For the IPNFs, the annual maintenance budget would need to be approximately \$6.6 million dollars and the cost to bring all roads up to their assigned maintenance level is estimated at \$520 million dollars.
- For the KNF, the annual maintenance budget would need to be approximately \$28.8 million dollars and the cost to bring all roads up to their assigned maintenance level is estimated at \$515 million dollars.

The significant cost to bring all roads up to their assigned maintenance level is part of the reason why access on the KNF and IPNFs needs to be addressed in the revision process. Funding is not sufficient to adequately maintain all of the existing roads on the KNF and IPNFs.

Table 1-28: Summary of Road Miles and Estimated Maintenance Costs by Objective Maintenance Levels

FOREST	Total Miles	Estimated Annual Maintenance Costs	Estimated Deferred Maintenance Costs
Idaho Panhandle			
Objective Maint. Level 5	99	\$206,415	\$99,000
Objective Maint. Level 4	258	\$894,228	\$1,291,290
Objective Maint. Level 3	1,965	\$3,075,225	\$44,275,380
Objective Maint. Level 2	2,452	\$1,500,624	\$96,008,060
Objective Maint. Level 1	6,819	\$988,755	\$378,454,500
TOTAL	11,593	\$6,665,247	\$520,128,230
Kootenai			
Objective Maint. Level 5	98	\$576,534	\$76,815,242
Objective Maint. Level 4	121	\$3,477,540	\$91,161,521
Objective Maint. Level 3	1,526	\$7,347,690	\$190,441,748
Objective Maint. Level 2	1,759	\$3,410,701	\$34,173,852
Objective Maint. Level 1	4,419	\$14,043,582	\$122,927,742
TOTAL	7,923	\$28,856,047	\$515,520,105

Source: USFS Infra database

Note: Approx. 28 miles of road on the IPNFs has unassigned Objective. Maint. Levels.

Approx. 31 miles of road on the KNF has unassigned Objective. Maint. Levels

Trends

Assessments conducted under the Resource Planning Act (RPA) are one source of information on the status and trends of renewable resources in the U.S. that help to set the stage for strategic planning. The following represents some of the findings and expectations from the 2000 RPA Assessment related to recreation and access (USDA 2000c, pp. 64-69):

- Demands for recreation and tourism and non-wood forest products will evolve and increase over time as the population increases and becomes more diverse.
- Given the projected increases in population and income, employment in the recreation and tourism sectors will likely increase over time.
- In part due to projected rising incomes, the number of participants in most recreation activities is projected to increase faster than the rates of growth in population with associated increases in employment opportunities.
- Increased rates of participation are expected in most recreation activities.
- There is a trend toward closing more private land to outdoor recreation in the future in all regions. The area of private land with free and open access to individuals whom the landowner does not know declined from 25 percent to 15 percent between the mid-1980's and mid-1990's.

Planning Question – What are the types, quantities, and distribution of recreation opportunities that historically and currently exist and what are the trends?

Types – What is it that we have to use and how can it be used? The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is used for classifying settings that range from rural to primitive. These classes are further distinguished as to whether they are for non-motorized use or motorized use. A distinction is made between Developed Recreation and Dispersed Recreation.

Quantities – How much of it is available to use? In relation to recreation, this refers to how many acres are identified in the various ROS classes.

Distribution – Where on the forest are the opportunities available?

Historic and Current Conditions of Recreation

Recreation is an important use of the forests. Since the 1980's, both motorized and non-motorized recreation use of the roads, trails, and general forest areas has increased dramatically. ATV and snowmobile travel are the two modes of travel that increased the most. Foot, horse, and mountain bike travel, and to a lesser degree, cross-country and backcountry skiing and river use have also increased.

With the increased use, recreationists are vying for quality recreation space, which may sometimes overlap or be the same area. This can manifest itself in conflicts (outside of wilderness) between recreationists that use non-motorized and those that use motorized modes of travel. Recreation conflicts occur when a user participating in one recreation activity reduces the recreation experience of another user. In isolated cases, there are conflicts between non-motorized recreationist's travel modes, (e.g. horseback riders, hikers, and mountain bikers).

Developed Recreation – generally, the developed recreation sites have kept pace with changing demands and expectations are, for the most part, met. Redesign and reconstruction has been ongoing with respects to changes for accommodating RV's, improving accessibility, and services such as potable water and

sanitation. Some expansions have also occurred to increase capacity. Reservation systems, Host programs, and Fee Demo programs have helped to keep pace with the changing times.

Dispersed recreation – there is difficulty in meeting expectations for dispersed recreation, and planning and management tools have not adapted to change. More people, doing more things, over larger and more diverse areas challenge KIPZ with the breadth and depth of their individual views of appropriate uses for National Forest lands.

As roads, trails, and areas are restricted or closed to motorized travel, use shifts from these areas and results in increases on those roads, trails, and areas that remain open to motorized use where a similar experience can be found. A sense of loss of freedom is resulting from the reduction of traditionally open roads available for motorized access. For example: the goal to ensure grizzly bear security has required the Forests to adapt to evolving direction from the USFWS, and the resulting increases in access restrictions have generated a strong reaction from forest users who are dissatisfied with the reduction in open roads available for their use.

Non-motorized user concerns revolve around conflicts with motorized users. These concerns include noise, the smell of exhaust, dust, safety issues, wildlife displacement and harassment, and resource damage (Final Off-Highway Vehicle Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Plan Amendment, January 2001c). Some people feel that motorized use is not appropriate in Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) and Forest Plan Recommended Wilderness. Some people also feel that if there is motorized travel in these areas, it should be kept at the 1977 use levels. This sentiment was upheld in a recent US District Court decision and judgment that the Forest Service violated Public Law 95-150. (The Forest Service is currently appealing this court decision.)

Some hunters feel that motorized use negatively affects their hunting experience. The results of a survey published by the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (1998) shows that improper vehicle/road hunting is one of the top behavioral problems of the 1997 hunting season. Nearly half of the respondents mentioned this problem. Respondents were also concerned about the widespread use of ATV's and their negative impact on the sport of hunting.

A study of Montana residents' trail use by the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research was conducted in 1994 (Harris and McCool 1994). The study was designed to be representative of the entire Montana population and included participants who engaged in walking for pleasure/day hiking, driving vehicles off-road for recreation, backpacking, and using ATVs and motorcycles off-road. 45% of the respondents agreed that conflicts on trails are relatively minor, while 15% disagreed. Less than 2% of the respondents reported conflict with others during their most recent trail experiences. In all cases, motorized users were more likely to say their activity was compatible with day hiking and backpacking. Backpackers and day hikers found other non-motorized activities to be most compatible with their activities.

In August 2000 at the "OHVs and Hunting Summit" sponsored by the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association (MTVRA), and the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOVAC), 12 instances were identified where hunters utilizing OHVs caused conflict and damage by inappropriate use of OHVs. These ranged from diminishing the traditional hunting experience to trespassing into areas and trails closed to motorized vehicles (Bell 2000).

In 1987, the KNF and IPNFs did not quantify how many acres on the forests were available in the different Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classes. Instead, the various MAs were identified as being appropriate for one or more of the ROS classes. The current ROS inventories are not up-to-date and do not reflect the significant changes in access that have occurred across the KNF and IPNFs. In addition, the ROS system has not been used to address the seasonality of recreation uses, and there is little direction in the Forest Plans for spatial (geographic) distribution of recreation/travel experiences.

Following is a summary of the settings and social situations we will be addressing in Forest Plan Revision:

Setting

Settings provide the “stage” for the six recreation opportunity classes of: Primitive, Semi-primitive non-motorized, Semi-primitive motorized, Roaded natural, Rural, and Urban. The relative availability of the different recreation opportunity settings can be determined by utilizing the review and evaluation framework of the ROS. As stated above, the current inventories are out-of-date and do not portray what is currently available on the KNF and IPNFs. The inventory will be updated for the DEIS.

Table 1-29 summarizes the acres by special management designations on both forests. These specific management designations contribute to the availability of recreation opportunities.

Table 1-29. Summary of Acres by Special Management Designation by Forest*

	Wilderness	Forest Plan Recommended Wilderness	Wilderness Study Area	Inventoried Roadless	Special Interest Areas
Idaho Panhandle	11,900	146,700	4,500	823,000**	8,200
Kootenai	93,700	104,100	34,800	639,100	12,300
TOTAL	105,600	250,800	39,300	1,462,100	20,500

Source: KNF and IPNFs 1987 Forest Plans, Current GIS Databases

* A particular area may be designated in more than one of the above categories (an area included in Recommended Wilderness may also be included in the forest’s Inventoried Roadless Areas, for example).

**As noted in Table 1-23, this acreage does not include approximately 13,000 acres of the St. Joe Wild and Scenic River Corridor where it flows through IRAs. With that area included, the acres for IPNFs IRAs would be 825,300.

Wilderness Areas – Since no motorized or mechanical use is allowed in classified wilderness, these areas are available for non-motorized and non-mechanical travel by foot, stock, skis, and snowshoes in the Primitive and Semi-Primitive Non-motorized ROS classes.

Recommended Wilderness Areas – These areas were identified in the Forest Plans as candidates for designated Wilderness status. They provide opportunities in the Primitive and Semi-primitive ROS classes.

Wilderness Study Area (WSAs) – Forest Plans also identified areas that were congressionally designated for evaluation for wilderness classification.

- On the IPNFs, the Grandmother Mountain Area was identified in the Idaho-Arkansas Land Exchange Act of 1992 as a Wilderness Study Area and the study was completed (by the BLM).
- On the KNF, the Ten Lakes Recommended Wilderness Area was included in the Montana Wilderness Study Area Act.

Both of these studies were completed and submitted to Congress for consideration but no decisions were made. They would provide opportunities in the Primitive and Semi-primitive ROS classes.

Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs)– The 1987 Forest Plan Roadless Evaluations proposed that the full range of recreation opportunities be available in areas with this designation. Some of these roadless areas were recommended for wilderness in the Forest Plans. Even though the potential development of lands identified as roadless was prescribed in Forest Plans, many people did not agree and the controversy has continued over the past decade. In November 2000, the Forest Service Roadless Area Conservation FEIS (USDA 2000e) was issued. The preferred alternative in this document prohibits or restricts road

construction or reconstruction and timber harvest in Inventoried Roadless Areas. It also creates procedures to identify, evaluate, and conserve or enhance the characteristics of IRAs through the land management planning process. IRAs provide opportunities in the Primitive and Semi-primitive ROS classes. For more information on IRAs, see the section on IRAs Revision Topic in this chapter.

Special Interest Areas (SIAs)– Special Interest Areas possess unique, unusual, or important flora, fauna, geological, recreational, cultural, or historic attributes. The Forest Plans specifically identified the areas that were known at that time. These designated areas were planned to provide a range of recreation opportunities from Semi-primitive non-motorized to Roaded natural. Since the Forest Plans, a number of newly recognized sites have been identified and added. Additional areas have been identified as candidates to be considered and need to be addressed in the Revision process.

These five special management designations combined provide 40% of the acres available for recreational use on the KNF and IPNFs. Two percent of this 40% is wilderness and is automatically non-motorized. WSAs and Forest Plan Recommended Wilderness make up six percent of the total and are mostly non-motorized in the summer, with some winter-motorized use allowed. If these areas (Study Areas and Recommended Areas) were to become wilderness, they too would be non-motorized, making a total of eight percent non-motorized.

Inventoried roadless areas comprise 31 % (based on a combined total of 4,720,000 acres) of NFS lands on the KIPZ. These lands are key to the future supply of both motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities as some of them could be managed either way.

The Forest Plan Revision will need to resolve the management of areas currently designated as WSAs or Forest Plan Recommended Wilderness. Revision will also need to address the management of IRAs within the direction of the Roadless Rule.

Social Situation

On the KNF and IPNFs, 40% of the area supplying recreation opportunities is in Wilderness, WSAs, Recommended Wilderness, Special Interest Areas, or Inventoried Roadless Areas. For the remaining 60% of the lands outside of these areas, people have differing views on what kind and amount of travel should be allowed.

Motorized travel (from all sources, i.e. commercial, management, recreation) has contributed to the spread of noxious weeds, vegetative damage, soil erosion, disturbance of wildlife and wildlife habitat, and damage to cultural sites. Non-motorized travel also contributes to these problems.

There has been an increase of unplanned, user created trails. Motorized, wheeled cross-country travel is causing resource and social problems. These resource and social problems were identified in the Northern Region Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) EIS and Proposed Plan Amendment (which applies to the KNF but not the IPNFs). A Record of Decision (ROD) was issued for this EIS in January 2001 (OHV ROD and Plan Amendment for Montana, North Dakota and Portions of South Dakota, p.4). This decision is intended to help manage future impacts from increasing use of OHVs on areas that are currently available to motorized, wheeled cross-country travel. Specifically, the amendment, as it pertains to the KNF, prohibits motorized, wheeled cross-country travel with some exceptions such as for emergency purposes. It also directs the KNF to prioritize travel management areas and begin site-specific travel planning on high priority areas within two years and moderate priority areas within five years and should result in the designations of roads and trails for their appropriate uses. OHV use on the IPNFs is not addressed in any of the current Forest management documents. This aspect of travel management will need to be addressed in the Forest Plan Revision process.

Technological improvements in recreational equipment, especially with snowmobiles which can traverse almost any kind of terrain, is allowing visitors to travel to previously inaccessible areas. The increase in travel in these areas has the potential to create both resource and social problems where none existed

before. At the time of forest planning in the 1980's, many of these areas were thought to have negligible use or were inaccessible.

An increase of motorized use in WSAs, Forest Plan Recommended Wilderness, and other planning areas where motorized use is permitted by 1987 Forest Plan direction has some groups concerned with protecting the wilderness character of these areas. This increase of motorized use has resulted in a lawsuit pertaining to Montana WSAs and also is a point of controversy regarding the mode of travel allowed in other areas.

There is a desire by non-motorized recreationists wanting more quiet trails and areas of solitude in areas where motorized use is presently permitted by Forest Plan direction. The areas where quiet and solitude are desired are often located in IRAs.

Except for the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District, there is a lack of formal designated motorized motorcycle, ATV and 4X4 trail systems, geographically distributed across the KIPZ, where people know they can go and have a variety of motorized opportunities. These are areas that would be publicized, are signed, have trailhead facilities, and have maps and information brochures available.

Motorized travel, both summer and winter, is increasing in the backcountry (semi-primitive areas). IRAs, which are mostly in a Semi-Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) setting, are important to the future supply of both motorized and non-motorized travel as they may be managed either way.

Use of ATVs during fall hunting season has increased and has created problems between those hunters who hike and those who use motorized machines to hunt and access areas. The noise created by motorized use is disturbing to some people's hunting experience and is perceived to disturb game.

Use of snowmobiles is disturbing to some skiers seeking a solitude type of experience in backcountry (semi-primitive) areas. The disturbance is noise, fumes, and the presence of tracks. The amount of snowmobile travel in WSAs in Montana and Idaho is being questioned by at least one group.

Winter recreation use is occurring in grizzly bear, lynx and caribou habitat. The effect of winter travel, both motorized and non-motorized, on the viability of these species on the KNF and IPNFs is unknown. The FEIS Forest Plan Amendments for Motorized Access Management within the Selkirk and Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Bear Recovery Zones was published in March 2002 but no decision has been issued. In addition, a Canada Lynx conservation strategy exists and is likely to have some effect on winter travel.

Problems with water travel are isolated incidents on a few lakes, but the problem is growing. The concern is mostly with the use of personal watercraft and powerboats disturbing other users.

The KNF and IPNFs Forest Plans offer minimal direction to resolve developing problems. Generally, the 1987 Forest Plans are broad and Standards and Guidelines for access and travel management do not address today's use and issues.

In addition, the KNF and IPNFs Forest Plans are not consistent in their approach to access and travel management. The plans are not linked to provide consistency of recreation user benefits across the two forests. The linkage between forest-wide goals, objectives, standards and guidelines, management area direction, desired ROS categories, and subsequent site/area specific access and travel planning in individual plans is weak or nonexistent. Following are specific examples of Forest Plans weaknesses:

- Where motorized use is permitted in WSAs, recommended wilderness areas, and further planning areas, guidelines for levels of access and travel related to maintaining wilderness character are not clear or are nonexistent.
- Monitoring requirements, especially for WSAs, recommended wilderness areas, and further planning areas, are basically nonexistent.
- Winter use, both motorized and non-motorized, is minimally addressed.

Trends

Assessments conducted under the RPA are one source of information on the status and trends of renewable resources in the US that help to set the stage for strategic planning. The following represents some of the findings and expectations from the 2000 RPA Assessment related to recreation and access (USDA 2000c, pp. 64-69):

- The most popular recreation activities through the years have been those that are relatively low cost, can be pursued without a great deal of physical exertion, and do not require special equipment or skills. (Cordell, 1999 p.221).
- Recreation activities with the greatest potential for future demand growth on private land include camping, hunting and other activities that require large open areas. The growth in the numbers of participants in hunting and fishing is projected to be less than the growth in population.
- Across all levels of government, there appears to be a nationwide trend toward increasing the number, quality, and scope of developed land-based recreation activities.
- Recreational use of existing designated wilderness areas is projected to increase between 0.5 and 1.0 percent per year for the next 50 years. (Cordell, 1999 p.374).
- The five fastest growing recreation activities through 2050, as mentioned by number of participants, are projected to be: cross-country skiing (95% growth), downhill skiing (93% growth), visiting historic places (76% growth), sightseeing (71% growth), and biking (70% growth) (Cordell, 1999 p.349)

A trend common to Montana and Idaho is the aging of the population (Campbell 1996). The percentage of persons under 20 years of age will decrease and the percentage of people over 65 will increase over the next 30 years. For example, in Montana:

- Percentage of population under 20 years old is projected to decrease from 30.2% in 1995 to 24.3% in 2025.
- Percentage of population 65 and over is expected to increase from 13.1% in 1995 to 24.5% in 2025.

Since 1991, out of state visitation to Montana has increased 28% (Travel Montana, 2002). This growth trend is expected to remain in the foreseeable future with some fluctuations due to economy or weather conditions.

Another important trend is the increasing popularity of public lands for recreation. A recent comprehensive report on recreation by Cordell (1999) indicates demand in the Rocky Mountain West (which includes Montana and Idaho) for the following activities will increase substantially by the year 2050: non-consumptive wildlife activities (94%), sightseeing opportunities (85%), fishing (59%), off-road driving (54%), hiking opportunities (44%), primitive camping (29%), backpacking opportunities (24%), and hunting (22%).

Truck registration increased during this time from 268,466 to 304,696 vehicles. From 1990 to 1998, annual sales of new ATV's, motocross bikes, and enduros in Montana increased from 2,700 to 4,539. This is an annual growth rate of 6.7%. This increasing trend in truck, ATV and motorcycles is expected to continue as the population continues to increase (USDA 2001c).

What are the implications of continuing under current management direction for Access and Recreation?
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Roads will continue to be managed to meet legal requirements. Watershed restoration projects will result in continuing decommissioning of roads. Wildlife security will be attained through the use of road restrictions. Under-maintained roads will continue to deteriorate and long-term economic and resource risks will increase. Many site-specific amendments may be required to deal with travel management. User expectations will not be met and dissatisfaction will continue to escalate.

Expectations for dispersed recreation users are not likely to be met. In some dispersed areas across the KIPZ (primarily river corridors and lands adjacent to lakes), overuse and resource degradation continues to occur due to the lack of proper facilities and transportation systems. Various groups will continue to advocate their interests and controversy is likely to continue. Unplanned and unmanaged uses will evolve and generate new areas of unresolved conflict.

Developed recreation sites are likely to meet the expectations of most users. Legally required health and safety issues will be met. Minimal funding for recreation site maintenance continues to be a problem and will intensify if the Fee Demonstration Program disappears.